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Beijing's Hard and Soft Repression in Hong Kong

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By Victoria Tin-bor Hui

Victoria Tin-bor Hui is Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Notre Dame. She is the author of *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). As a native from Hong Kong, she has also published on the city's democracy movement.

Abstract: Hong Kong's new Police Commissioner Chris Tang announced in Beijing on December 7, 2019, that he would use "both hard and soft approaches" to end the anti-government protests. This article argues that such "approaches" amount to physical and non-physical repression—hard power, but employed by Hong Kong, rather than mainland, forces, combined with sharp power exercised by both Beijing and the local authorities. These measures are responses to the limits on what Beijing can do under the "one country, two systems" model. As Beijing cannot send the People's Liberation Army (PLA), it has subverted Hong Kong's once-respected civilian police force to act like the mainland's public security. And as Hong Kong's judiciary is relatively autonomous and many of the arrested would not be convicted or sentenced, the police have resorted to a decapacitation campaign to inflict direct violence on protesters. Moreover, as the city's freedom has allowed the public to support protesters in various ways, Beijing has launched a program of dismissal of pro-democracy individuals in both public and private sectors. To zoom in on Beijing's hard and soft repression, this article examines in closer detail the other "frontliners" at protest sites who provide professional services vital to the sustainability of protests: medics, firefighters, lawyers, journalists, and educators.

Hong Kong's Police Commissioner Chris Tang, who assumed office on November 19, 2019, announced in Beijing on December 7, 2019, that he would use "both hard and soft approaches" to end the anti-government protests which have taken place since May 2019.¹ The protests started in response to a proposed law to permit the extradition of people from the city to face prosecution by mainland authorities. The declared "hard and soft approaches" offer a prime example of how Beijing has deployed measures that lie between conventional "hard

¹ Christy Leung and Amanda Lee, "New Hong Kong Police Chief Chris Tang tells top Beijing officials that 'hard and soft' tactics will be used to thwart protest crisis," *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 7, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3041102/new-hong-kong-police-chief-chris-tang-tells-top>.

power” and “soft power” in Hong Kong. Tang himself explained that he would take tougher actions against violent acts, such as the use of petrol bombs and arson. At the same time, he promised to deal with peaceful protests and minor issues among young protesters in a “more humane and flexible way.”

Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Carrie Lam, arguably, has offered a softer approach by launching another set of livelihood policies worth about HK\$10 billion in mid-January 2020. These policies include expansion of mandatory holidays, retirement fund contributions, allowances for the elderly, and cash handouts for the unemployed and low-income households.² The latest package adds to three other rounds announced since August 2019 and brings the total of new annual expenditure to HK\$24 billion.³

Yet, while the Hong Kong government claims to alleviate poverty for the grassroots, it is also taking away livelihoods for pro-democracy actors as a form of sharp power. Beijing and the Hong Kong governments have certainly not made it easier to voice dissent. The Hong Kong police have wielded hard power by greeting Christmas, the New Year, and Lunar New Year with more tear gas, arrests, and beatings.⁴

Statements and actions by Hong Kong’s police head, and even its Chief Executive, reflect Beijing’s dictates rather than the local government’s own initiatives. Hong Kong has been promised “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” with “a high degree of autonomy” under the “one country, two systems” model. This model was laid out in the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and the 1990 Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Since the handover in 1997, however, Beijing has been ruling from behind the scenes. Beijing’s former chief representative in Hong Kong, Liaison Office Director Wang Zhimin, commented, “It is good that Central (the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government) and Western Districts (the Liaison Office) work together.”⁵ In 2014, Beijing issued a White Paper on Hong Kong, which ruled out genuine universal suffrage and, thus, triggered the Umbrella Movement, and also proclaimed the central government’s “comprehensive jurisdiction”

² He Shusi and Li Bingcun, “HK govt to spend extra HK\$10 billion to address livelihood issues,” *China Daily*, Jan. 15, 2020, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202001/15/WS5e1e7c1aa31012821727120d.html>.

³ He and Li, “HK govt to spend extra HK\$10 billion to address livelihood issues.” Hong Kong further announced a HK\$30 billion relief fund to help businesses weather the coronavirus. Kimmy Chung and Kanis Leung, “Coronavirus: lawmakers expected to rush HK\$30 billion relief package through Hong Kong legislature, but some call for cash handouts to benefit workers,” *South China Morning Post*, Feb. 20, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/hong-kong-economy/article/3051647/coronavirus-lawmakers-expected-rush-hk30-billion>.

⁴ SCMP reporters, “Mass arrests and violence: no end in sight for Hong Kong protests in 2020,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 2, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3044238/hong-kong-begins-2020-just-2019-ended-protest-chaos>.

⁵ [No author] “Wang Zhimin’s ‘Central and Western Districts Coming Together’ once stirred up controversy,” *Sing Tao Daily USA*, Jan. 4, 2020, <https://www.singtaousa.com/home/19-即時港聞/2644275-王志民「中環西環行理」論會惹熱議/>.

over the city.⁶ (The Umbrella Movement protested against Beijing's refusal to move toward the "ultimate aim" of choosing the Chief Executive and the Legislative Council by "universal suffrage," as promised in the Hong Kong Basic Law.⁷) After June 9, 2019, when a million people demonstrated against the extradition bill, the Central Coordination Group for Hong Kong and Macau Affairs chaired by Vice Premier Han Zheng began to exert close supervision over Hong Kong from across the border. Before Lam "suspended" the extradition bill on June 15, 2019, she met with Han in Shenzhen.⁸ On November 1, 2019, the Fourth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party formally announced that it would "exercise governance" in Hong Kong.⁹ By early 2020, Beijing appointed senior-ranked leaders, Xia Baolong and Luo Huining, to head the State Council's Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office in Beijing and its Liaison Office in Hong Kong, respectively. Xia, who has served as the vice-chairman of China's top political advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, is a close ally of General Secretary Xi Jinping. These reshuffles are seen to directly place Hong Kong under central control.¹⁰

The Chief Executive has so little autonomy that it is unclear whether the police chief answers to her or to Beijing. Beijing officials from Xi on down have praised the Hong Kong police's "forceful actions" against "rioters."¹¹ Immediately after the promotion, Police Commissioner Tang changed the police's motto from "We Serve with Pride and Care," which suggests some public accountability, to "Serving Hong Kong with Honor, Duty and Loyalty," underscoring loyalty to the powers that be.¹² During Tang's first official visit to Beijing on December 6-7, 2019, he met with the

⁶ Tony Cheung, Gary Cheung, Samuel Chan and Kang-chung Ng, "Beijing emphasises its total control over Hong Kong in white paper," *South China Morning Post*, June 10, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1529300/beijing-reasserts-its-total-control-over-hong-kong-white-paper>.

⁷ The Basic Law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Articles 45 and 68, https://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_4.html.

⁸ Tripti Lahiri and Mary Hui, "Hong Kong has pulled off an amazing win against a dire threat to its freedoms," Quartz, June 15, 2019, <https://qz.com/1644726/hong-kong-leader-carrie-lam-indefinitely-suspends-extradition-bill/>.

⁹ Press conference of the Fourth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Nov. 1, 2019, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/talking/20191101z/>

¹⁰ Chi-kin Lo, "Reshuffling of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office: Strengthening Centralization, Heightening Danger," *Hong Kong Citizen News*, Feb. 16, 2020, <https://www.hkcnews.com/article/26956/港澳辦-夏寶龍-駱惠寧-26956/整頓港澳辦：加強集權、更加危險>.

¹¹ Laura Zhou, "Xi Jinping again backs Hong Kong police use of force in stopping unrest," *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 14, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3037811/xi-jinping-again-backs-hong-kong-police-use-force-stopping>.

¹² Kris Cheng, "Hong Kong police drop 'pride and care' motto, now vow to serve with 'honour, duty and loyalty,'" *Hong Kong Free Press*, Nov. 20, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/11/20/hong-kong-police-drop-pride-care-motto-now-vow-serve-honour-duty-loyalty/>.

then director of Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office Zhang Xiaoming; Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission Guo Shengkun; and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi. Curiously, Lam herself had similar sit-downs with Guo and Zhao.¹³ It is also noteworthy that Tang, who was once the district commander in Yuen Long, is reputed to be linked to the mob attacks on commuters, residents, and passers-by in Yuen Long station on July 21.¹⁴ When Lam's deputy, Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung, apologized that "the police's handling fell short of the citizens' expectations," he was rebuked publicly by the Police Inspectors' Association.¹⁵ One anonymous statement read: "Matthew Cheung, why do you deserve to represent the police force? If you want to apologize, you should resign. You don't step down or apologize to the whole force, you will be a sworn enemy of the police!"¹⁶

Hard and Soft Repression

Tang's hard and soft instruments are means to overcome the limits on what Beijing can do under the "one country, two systems" model. In trying to get around these constraints, Beijing is making a "less spectacular and more insidious" attempt to "dismantle the city's lifeblood of liberal education, judicial independence and press freedom."¹⁷

Tang stressed that hardness does not mean the quintessential form of hard power—the deployment of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers. Although the military released a threatening video of anti-riot drills on July 31, 2019 and doubled the number of troops stationed in the Hong Kong garrison from 6,000 to about 12,000,¹⁸

¹³ Jun Mai, Echo Xie and William Zheng, "Why was China's domestic security chief Guo Shengkun at Carrie Lam's meeting with Xi Jinping?" *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 17, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3042352/why-was-chinas-domestic-security-chief-guo-shengkun-carrie-lams>.

¹⁴ Lok-kei Sum, "Hong Kong police chief tangles with opposition councilors for second time in week over force's handling of protests," *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 22, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3047251/hong-kong-police-chief-tangles-opposition-councillors>.

¹⁵ Christy Leung and Victor Ting, "Police anger after Hong Kong No 2 Matthew Cheung says sorry for Yuen Long attack response," *South China Morning Post*, Jul. 26, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3020251/hong-kong-no-2-matthew-cheung-says-sorry-police-response>.

¹⁶ Holmes Chan, "Hong Kong's chief sec. apologises over handling of Yuen Long attacks, stirring dissent from police," *Hong Kong Free Press*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/07/26/hong-kongs-chief-sec-apologises-handling-yuen-long-attacks-stirring-dissent-police/>.

¹⁷ Kirsty Needham, "There's a bigger and more insidious threat to Hong Kong than the PLA," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Jan. 10, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/there-s-a-bigger-and-more-insidious-threat-to-hong-kong-than-the-pla-20191231-p53nun.html>.

¹⁸ Greg Torode, James Pomfret, and David Lague, "The China Challenge: The Hong Kong Front," *Reuters*, Sept. 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-hongkong/>.

the PLA largely has stayed inside the barracks. When they ventured out onto the streets of Hong Kong in November and December 2019, they were dressed in civilian clothes and armed with buckets rather than guns to clear roads of debris. This act led many observers, including U.S. President Donald Trump, to praise General Secretary Xi's restraint in handling the unrest in Hong Kong.

However, rolling out military tanks into Hong Kong in a fashion reminiscent of Beijing's suppression of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989 is not its only option. In fact, it would be the worst choice—and counterproductive. It would be tantamount to the formal abrogation of the “one country, two systems” model that Beijing pledged for post-handover Hong Kong. This action could trigger other countries to end Hong Kong's special customs status from which Beijing has reaped immense benefits and could destroy confidence in Hong Kong's economy. U.S. officials apparently warned their Chinese counterparts that “there would be consequences if China tried to use force” against Hong Kong protesters.¹⁹ Yet, even in the mainland, Beijing has, since Tiananmen, turned to public security officers rather than military troops to intimidate and silence rights defense activists.

Beijing cannot send down its own public security officers to Hong Kong either, at least not in mainland uniforms. But the central government has appropriated the city's once-respected civilian police force to inflict “direct violence” or physical repression on protesters.²⁰ Beijing effectively has turned Hong Kong's police force from “Asia's finest” into an extension of mainland's public security, arresting and beating protesters with impunity.²¹ News reports suggest that the plan is to “arrest as many as possible . . . until there is nobody left.”²² By mid-January 2020, police had arrested more than 7,000 and charged 2,000 for unlawful assemblies, rioting, possession of weapons, arson, and other offenses.

The police have followed an unprecedented and lawless decapacitation campaign, inflicting debilitating injuries on protesters and supporters. They regularly have fired tear gas, rubber bullets, beanbag rounds, and water cannons at high velocity, at head level, and at close range, so that even technically non-lethal crowd-control

¹⁹ However, the message was simply “don't kill them” rather than “long live democracy.” Uri Friedman and Peter Nicholas, “Hong Kong: A Defining Moment for Trump's Foreign Policy,” *The Atlantic*, Aug. 23, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/08/hong-kong-will-define-trumps-foreign-policy/596683/>.

²⁰ The concept is taken from Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 37.

²¹ Chris Yeung, “HK Police Now Just Another Mainland Force,” *Voice of Hong Kong*, Aug. 13, 2019, <http://www.vohk.hk/2019/08/13/hk-police-now-just-another-mainland-force/>.

²² Shapunshan, “Sources: Government would not agree to five demands, using war of attrition to counter protesters,” HK01, Aug. 27, 2019, [https://www.hk01.com/政情/368236/政圈風聲-消息-政府不會答允五大訴求-消耗戰-抗衡示威者](https://www.hk01.com/政情/368236/政圈風聲-消息-政府不會答允五大訴求-消耗戰-抗衡示威者;);

Keith Bradsher, “Beijing's Hong Kong Strategy: More Arrests, No Concessions,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/30/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-beijing.html>.

weapons could cause severe injuries.²³ Since August 11, 2019, police officers have routinely beaten the arrested with batons, pinned them down and rubbed their faces against the ground, pepper-sprayed their wounds, and broken their bones.²⁴ Officers even fired live ammunition with near-fatalities on October 1 and November 11. Immediately after his promotion to police chief in November 2019, Tang assumed command of an assault on protesters at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Hong Kong analysts suspect that he had a deliberate strategy to lure hardcore protesters to “defend” Polytechnic and then to arrest them.²⁵ In this single operation, the police arrested 1,377 and registered 318 below the age of 18.²⁶ When supporters poured into nearby areas to divert the police, police vehicles rammed them at high speed, causing a stampede with traumatic injuries.²⁷ In detention centers, the arrested are denied access to families and lawyers for hours.²⁸ Some detainees, especially those taken to the now infamous San Uk Ling Center after August 11, suffered from bone fractures and brain bleeding.²⁹ Women have complained of sexual assault,³⁰ and even rape.³¹

²³ K.K. Rebecca Lai and Austin Ramzy, “1,800 Rounds of Tear Gas: Was the Hong Kong Police Response Appropriate?” *New York Times*, Aug. 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/18/world/asia/hong-kong-tear-gas.html>.

²⁴ Barbara Marcolini, “‘I Was Begging for Mercy’: How Undercover Officers in Hong Kong Launched a Bloody Crackdown,” *New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/world/hong-kong-police-protests.html>.

²⁵ Chi-kin Lo, “What was the purpose for manufacturing the Polytechnic tragedy?” *Hong Kong Citizen News*, Nov. 19, 2019, <https://www.hkcnews.com/article/24918/圍困理工-1117 理工衝突-鄧炳強-24918/製造理大慘案、所為何事？>.

²⁶ [No author] “A total of over 10,000 petrol bombs seized from various universities, 4000 from Poly U, 5,890 protesters arrested since June,” *Dimsum Daily Hong Kong*, Nov. 29, 2019, <https://www.dimsumdaily.hk/a-total-of-over-10000-petrol-bombs-seized-from-various-universities-4000-from-poly-u-5890-protesters-arrested-since-june/>.

²⁷ Kris Cheng, “Hong Kong police accused of driving vehicles into protesters during clearance operation,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Nov. 19, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/11/19/hong-kong-police-accused-driving-vehicles-protesters-clearance-operation/>.

²⁸ Kanis Leung, “Arrest and detention of children over Hong Kong’s anti-government protests raise questions on police treatment and legal process,” *South China Morning Post*, Oct. 20, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3033706/arrest-and-detention-children-over-hong-kongs-anti>.

²⁹ Amnesty International, “Hong Kong: Arbitrary arrests, brutal beatings and torture in police detention revealed,” Sept. 19, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/hong-kong-arbitrary-arrests-brutal-beatings-and-torture-in-police-detention-revealed/>.

³⁰ Chris Lau, “Hong Kong student who accused police of sexual violence against protesters has taken legal advice and plans further action,” *South China Morning Post*, Oct. 11, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3032610/hong-kong-student-who-accused-police-sexual-violence>.

³¹ Jennifer Creery, “‘Grossly unprofessional’: Lawyers slam Hong Kong police for ‘privacy breach’ after woman accuses officers of gang rape,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Nov. 12, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/11/12/grossly-unprofessional-lawyers-slam-hong-kong-police-privacy-breach-woman-accuses-officers-gang-rape/>.

As such, Beijing has orchestrated a bloody crackdown with or without mainland forces. Media and civic organizations, both internationally and locally, have compiled reports documenting police abuses.³² Significantly, the riot police have committed such beatings and torture in front of professional and citizen cameras, suggesting that “they understand they are immune from redress.”³³ Indeed, Carrie Lam repeatedly has praised the police force’s “outstanding performance” and denounced accusations of police violence.³⁴

In order to punish the arrested, Beijing also targets Hong Kong’s judicial autonomy as promised in the Basic Law, which is another major constraint on its ability to repress dissent. In mainland China, the public security bureau can detain targets for lengthy periods and can count on judges to convict those who are charged. In Hong Kong, professional judges still tend to follow the common law tradition, which historically has been sensitive to the free speech rights of public order defendants. Beijing has not hidden its displeasure at Hong Kong’s judicial independence. In the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement in 2014, central officials and local pro-regime voices repeatedly complained that judges released the majority of protest-related defendants or gave very lenient sentences to the convicted few.³⁵ In November 2016, Chen Zuor, former deputy director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, ominously asked: “The price of committing an offence was too low in some situations in Hong Kong... Taking the Occupy Movement as an example, how many movement leaders were brought to the court up until now? Why were they not in the court?”

³² Shibani Mahtani, Timothy McLaughlin, Tiffany Liang and Ryan Ho Kilpatrick, “In Hong Kong crackdown, police repeatedly broke their own rules — and faced no consequences,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/world/hong-kong-protests-excessive-force/>; Progressive Scholars Group, “Silencing Millions: Unchecked Violations of Internationally Recognized Human Rights by the Hong Kong Police Force,” Jan. 2020, <https://www.docdroid.net/0EA2Bhy/silencingmillions-text-final.pdf>; Hong Kong Civil Rights Observers, “Report On Police Use Of Force In Handling The Anti-Extradition Bill Protest In And Around Admiralty, Hong Kong On 12 June 2019,” Jan. 19, 2020, <http://hkcro.org/report/CRO-612report-Eng.pdf>.

³³ Carol Anne Goodwin Jones, “How Hong Kong police trained for riots – and why their response to protesters has been so violent,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Sept. 24, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/09/24/hong-kong-police-trained-riots-response-protesters-violent/>.

³⁴ [No author] “Carrie Lam issues letter to Police Commissioner praising the force’s ‘outstanding performance,’” *Stand News*, Jan. 9, 2020, <https://www.thestandnews.com/politics/去信鄧炳強感謝帶領警隊-林鄭-警員傑出表現-值得高度讚賞/>; Caroline Kwok and Zinnia Lee, “Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam rejects allegations of police brutality against protesters,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 16, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/video/hong-kong/3046439/hong-kong-leader-carrie-lam-rejects-allegations-police-brutality-against>.

³⁵ Christy Leung, “‘No mercy’ for Hong Kong’s pro-independence ‘rats’ says head of top Beijing think tank,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 30, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/2050425/no-mercy-hong-kongs-pro-independence-rats-says-head-top>.

Since then, courts have been more obliging, giving activists jail sentences rather than community service. By 2019, the Chief Executive's "overriding power" over appointments has turned the Justice Department into a trusted agency to charge those arrested with the heaviest crimes, including rioting and arson. Judges' independence has also been weakened by promotions and appointments of regime loyalists. Nonetheless, the courts are still buttressed by professional judges who issue verdicts strictly based on evidence. In November 2019, a local court particularly infuriated Beijing by declaring unconstitutional the government's ban on protesters' wearing masks.³⁶ In response, Beijing officials have urged all branches of government, the judiciary as well as the executive and the legislature, to join forces in "stopping the violence and ending the turmoil."³⁷

The authorities in Hong Kong have taken steps to undermine another constraint—the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Basic Law. Protests in Hong Kong require a "no objection" permit from the police. The application was merely a pro forma procedure for decades after the handover. However, after another massive turnout of 1.7 million (in a city of 7.4 million) on August 18, the police began to issue objections, rendering subsequent protests "unlawful assemblies" vulnerable to arrests and beatings. Although the police granted permission for an annual demonstration on January 1, 2020, they ordered organizers to suspend it half way through, then rounded up and arrested hundreds of protesters. The police also refused to issue permits for Lunar New Year market fairs to some pro-democracy grassroots organizations and District Councilors. Even Lennon Walls of post-its and art works with political messages have been taken down by government cleaners with riot police standing guard. While protesters who participate in and organize "unlawful assemblies" can be arrested, beaten, and convicted, supporters who merely post sympathetic messages on social media and donate money and supplies cannot be charged, let alone convicted.

This leads to Tang's "softer" hand in his mix of hard and soft methods. "Soft power," according to scholar Joseph Nye, should be "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." A country's sources of soft power are "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)."³⁸ However, as analysts at the National Endowment for Democracy Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig contend, Beijing's suppression of political pluralism and free expression beyond its borders constitutes

³⁶ Michael C. Davis, "In Hong Kong, Beijing's tough talk could spark a constitutional crisis," Monkey Cage, *Washington Post*, Nov. 21, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/11/21/hong-kong-beijings-tough-talk-could-spark-constitutional-crisis/>.

³⁷ [No author] "Political sector: Three branches of government must work together to end the violence and control the turmoil," *Ta Kung Pao*, Nov. 8, 2019, <http://www.takungpao.com.hk/news/232109/2019/1108/370841.html>.

³⁸ Joseph S. Nye, "What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power: Beijing and Moscow are trying their hands at attraction, and failing—miserably," *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>.

“sharp,” rather than “soft,” power.³⁹ Hong Kong commentator Chi-kin Lo agrees that China’s so-called “soft” power is in fact menacing.⁴⁰

Repressive “sharp power” or “political warfare” can be as effective as hard power, whether by military or police forces. In the mainland, the party has deployed not only physical batons and guns, but also non-physical ideological indoctrination, legal persecution, denial of licenses, employment discrimination, harassment, and surveillance. In freer Hong Kong, the Beijing and Hong Kong authorities have deployed the weapons of appointment versus dismissal and of funding. If hard power or physical repression aims at decapitating core protesters, sharp power or non-physical repression is better suited for intimidating broader society. Physical repression tends to backfire, especially when abuses are live streamed, while non-physical forms are less visible and less likely to generate public outrage.

Beijing’s sharp power in Hong Kong is wide-ranging because there is significant support for the protests.⁴¹ In the District Council elections held on November 24, 2019, candidates who campaigned on protest demands won 57 percent of the popular vote and 391 out of 452 seats, taking the majority in 17 of 18 District Councils.⁴² Across Hong Kong, many professional groups have organized pro-democracy protests, including: medical professionals, social workers, civil servants, lawyers, airlines crew, teachers, accountants, surveyors, architects, and financial sector staff. Various groups have self-organized to provide supplies and service to protesters. Restaurants and churches have offered shelters. Middle-class car owners have served as chauffeurs to transport protesters after the police took control over the mass transit system last August. Passersby and protesters alike document police abuses and immediately share footage on social media.⁴³ As a *New York Times* story puts it, “behind Hong Kong’s protesters,” there is “an army of volunteer pastors, doctors and artists.”⁴⁴

³⁹ Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, “From ‘Soft Power’ to ‘Sharp Power’: Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World,” National Endowment for Democracy, Dec. 5, 2017, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Chi-kin Lo, “After failing to ‘manufacture violence’ and boost votes [for the District Council elections], authorities turn to both hard and soft measures,” *Hong Kong Citizen News*, Dec. 16, 2019, <https://www.hkcnews.com/article/25458/2019區議會選舉-圍困理工-25460/>.

⁴¹ Francis L.F. Li, “Changes in popular political leanings in the resistance movement,” Ming Pao, Oct. 24, 2019, <https://news.mingpao.com/pns/觀點/article/20191024/s00012/1571853884453>.

⁴² Benny Yiu-ting Tai, “This Was Hong Kong’s Most Important Election Ever,” *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/opinion/hong-kong-election-results.html>.

⁴³ K.K. Rebecca Lai, “In Hong Kong, a Vast Citizens’ Network Keeps Watch on the Police,” *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/12/22/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-arrests-telegram.html>.

⁴⁴ Andrew Jacobs, “Behind Hong Kong’s Protesters, an Army of Volunteer Pastors, Doctors and Artists,” *New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/world/asia/hong-kong-protests.html>; Lili Kuo, “‘They seem so helpless’: Hongkongers flock to aid besieged protesters,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 18, 2019,

In response to this whole-of-society support, Beijing has launched a whole-of-society crackdown. The logic is not unlike standard counterinsurgency: if “insurgents” are like “fish in water,” then the most effective way to destroy the fish is to drain the water.⁴⁵

Beijing, along with the Hong Kong government, has used its potent political and financial leverage to subdue Hong Kong. First, the Hong Kong government funds not just the civil service, but also a variety of public sectors, including mass transit, health care, universities, schools, sports, and arts. Mainland businesses, many closely linked to the party and the state, also dominate the Hong Kong economy.⁴⁶ Beijing, thus, has the clout to pressure even the private sector to police their employees’ open support for the protests. Most notably, Cathay Pacific Airlines has fired staff for posting “Go Hong Kong!”⁴⁷

Targeting the Other Frontliners

The measures used against frontline protesters are well-known and well-chronicled.⁴⁸ The repression of “other frontliners” provides even more telling illustrations of Beijing’s combined use of hard and soft repression against the entire society —methods that lie between the direct use of “hard power” that Beijing has foregone and the “soft power” that Beijing and the Hong Kong government lack. The authorities particularly have targeted professionals who have maintained a regular presence at protest sites. Firefighters, first-aid volunteers, journalists, social workers, security guards, and civil rights observers are in this category. Some of them are on site simply to perform their professional roles, not necessarily to show their political support for protesters. Their presence “facilitates the accountability of public officers

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/18/they-seem-so-helpless-hongkongers-flock-to-aid-besieged-protesters>.

⁴⁵ Peter Maass, “Professor Nagl’s War,” *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 11, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/11/magazine/professor-nagl-s-war.html>.

⁴⁶ [No author] “Listed companies appoint mainlanders to boards of directors,” 852 Post, Dec. 5, 2019, <https://www.post852.com/292197/報道統計董事局「染紅」上市公司%E3%80%80新地港燈港鐵/>.

⁴⁷ Tania Branigan and Erin Hale, “Cathay denounced for firing Hong Kong staff after pressure from China,” *The Guardian*, Aug. 28, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/28/cathay-pacific-denounced-for-firing-hong-kong-staff-on-china-orders>.

⁴⁸ Marcolini, “I Was Begging for Mercy”; Progressive Scholars Group, “Silencing Millions”; Hong Kong Civil Rights Observers, “Report On Police Use Of Force”; Amnesty International, “Patterns of repression: Timeline of the 2019 Hong Kong protests,” Oct. 11, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/timeline-of-the-2019-hong-kong-protests/>; Rosemarie Ho, “The Hong Kongers Building a Case Against the Police,” *The Nation*, Nov. 27, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/hong-kong-police-brutality/>; Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “Beijing’s All-Out Crackdown on the Anti-Extradition Protests in Hong Kong,” *China Leadership Monitor*, iss. 62, Dec. 1, 2019, <https://www.prcleader.org/victoria-hui>; Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “The Hong Kong Reckoning,” testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission “U.S.-China Relations in 2019: A Year in Review,” Sept. 4, 2019, <https://www.uscc.gov/Hearings/us-china-relations-2019-year-review>.

as well as ... measures to protect the right to peaceful assembly,” aspects vital to the sustainability of protests.⁴⁹ As police abuses escalated, professionals began to provide humanitarian assistance to protesters. Yet, over time, these professionals have themselves become increasingly vulnerable to physical repression. Chi-wai Lam, chairman of the Junior Police Officers' Association, contends that those who simply stand and watch also have to bear criminal liability: “Your acts of assisting rioters to commit crime and escape, or obstructing police officers to execute duties are possibly unlawful.”⁵⁰ On January 1, 2020, even the non-political Civil Rights Observer had three members arrested for the first time. The police explained that no one—including journalists, first-aiders, and observers—had the right to stay in a “riot.”⁵¹ This blatantly violates the international norms that independent monitors “should not be harassed, arrested or penalized as a result of their attendance at a protest for observation,” “no matter whether an assembly is declared unlawful, is no longer peaceful, or is dispersed.”⁵² Arrested or not, frontline professionals are also subject to non-physical repression, especially dismissal.

Civil Servants. As civil servants include not just administrative staff, but also firefighters, medics, teachers, and social workers—that is, many other types of frontliners—the first order is to remake the once-impartial civil servants into de facto Chinese Communist Party cadres. While Beijing has long insisted that the Chief Executive appoint “patriots” to top government positions, now the ranks of middle- and lower-level public employees are also to be cleansed of protest supporters. Pro-Beijing Executive Council member Kwok-him Ip has said that Hong Kong's civil servants are formally party-state cadres.⁵³ Beijing's official *People's Daily* warns that civil servants who either “sympathize with” or “silently approve of” protests would suffer the certain consequence of “losing their careers and future prospects” and “perishing

⁴⁹ “Arrest of human rights monitors in breach of the Hong Kong government's international obligations,” Frontline Defenders, Feb. 11, 2020, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/arrest-human-rights-monitors-breach-hong-kong-governments-international-human>.

⁵⁰ Karen Zhang, “Hong Kong police union chief condemns protesters who claim ‘peaceful’ tag, and says they are just as guilty as violent radicals,” *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 28, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3043761/hong-kong-police-union-chief-condemns-protesters-who>.

⁵¹ Jeffie Lam and Victor Ting, “Hong Kong protests: civil rights group accuses police of breaking international law after three observers are arrested,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 2, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3044305/hong-kong-protests-civil-rights-group-accuses-police>.

⁵² Frontline Defenders, “Arrest of human rights monitors in breach of the Hong Kong government's international obligations.”

⁵³ [No author] “Kwok-him Ip: Hong Kong civil servants are state cadres broadly speaking,” 852 Post, Dec. 21, 2019, <https://www.post852.com/293383/葉國謙：香港公務員廣義上是國家幹部%E3%80%80對《憲法》/>.

with rioters.”⁵⁴ In early January 2020, Secretary for Civil Service Joshua Law announced that 31 out of 41 arrested civil servants were suspended, even if they had not been charged or convicted.⁵⁵ In this environment, civil servants who want to improve their career prospects are visibly expressing their loyalty. When newly elected pro-democracy District Councilors moved motions condemning the government or the police, administrative officers, who are supposed to serve any elected representatives, staged walkouts.⁵⁶

Medics. Police operations that inflict debilitating injuries on protesters would be less effective if the injured are readily treated. As such, the police have fired crowd-control weapons at first-aiders, required emergency workers and ambulances to seek police permission and even obstructed their paths, rounded up suspected protesters at hospitals, ordered doctors to provide bare minimal treatment to patients at detention wards and banned nurses from calling families on their behalf. Tsz-lok Chow, the first undeniable protest-related death, died partially because the police had blocked an ambulance arriving for him.⁵⁷ Seeing hundreds, then thousands, of injured people fearful of going to hospitals, doctors and nurses created underground clinics at the end of July 2019.⁵⁸ They have witnessed first-hand the extent of physical harm, including bone fractures and brain injuries with risks of permanent disabilities.⁵⁹ Thus, the profession has signed petitions and staged sit-ins and rallies criticizing police brutality, even under the slogan “Hong Kong police attempt to murder Hong Kong citizens.”⁶⁰ Medics insist they must provide medical treatment to people of all political views, yet

⁵⁴ He Huifeng, “Hong Kong civil servants who support protests will perish with rioters,” *People’s Daily*, Nov. 3, 2019,

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3036104/hong-kong-civil-servants-who-support-protests-will-burn-rioters>.

⁵⁵ Garry Cheung, “Hong Kong protests: 31 arrested civil servants suspended from posts,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 10, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3045494/hong-kong-protests-31-arrested-civil-servants-suspended>.

⁵⁶ Simon Lau, “Civil servants becoming party cadres,” *Apple Daily*, Jan. 20, 2020, <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/20200120/YI2CV6BAYP7TSWPAGBVXNZ3UKY/>.

⁵⁷ [No author] “Firefighters confirmed that ambulance to rescue UST student was blocked,” *Radio Television Hong Kong*, Nov. 6, 2019, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/ch/component/k2/1490436-20191106.htm>.

⁵⁸ Jasmine Leung, Nicola Smith and Anna Kam, “The medics defying authorities to secretly treat Hong Kong protesters,” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Dec. 29, 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/the-medics-defying-authorities-to-secretly-treat-hong-kong-protesters-20191229-p53nfb.html>; John Leicester, “Hong Kong’s undercover medics reveal hidden toll of protests,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 8, 2019.

⁵⁹ [No author] “Nurse from Northern District Hospital discloses unusual injuries among the arrested,” *Now TV*, Aug. 27, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=700053943789969>; “Medics’ rally played audios and videos of injuries,” *Stand News*, Oct. 26, 2019, <https://www.thestandnews.com/politics/10-26-醫護集會-大會播傷者錄音-手指中彈骨折-憂被捕拒赴公院-聯絡地下醫療駁骨/>.

⁶⁰ Kimmy Chung and Elizabeth Cheung, “More than 1,000 health care staff stage sit-in to condemn ‘excessive use of force’ by Hong Kong police on anti-government protesters,” *South China Morning Post*, Aug. 13, 2019 <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3022650/more-1000-health-care-staff-stage-sit-condemn-excessive-use>.

the police have increasingly accused them of siding with protesters and called them “black doctors” and “black nurses.”⁶¹

When the first doctor was arrested in mid-October 2019, the Hospital Authority expressed “concern and sympathy” to the employee involved and offered to “provide appropriate and feasible help.” State media, the *People's Daily*, charged the public body for being “biased,” while *Xinhua News* accused it of “harboring violence.”⁶² Although video footage showed that the doctor was not involved in any violence, *Xinhua* asked, “Is the authority standing with mobs and violence, or standing on the side of the Special Administrative Region government and law and justice?” The commentary urged the Hospital Authority not to “take a soft stance” when handling “hospitals that obstructed police enforcing law” and “health care workers joining violent illegal activities.”⁶³

The most disturbing scene occurred during the siege of Polytechnic University on November 17. As Dr. Darren Mann wrote in *The Lancet*,

A photograph, widely circulated online, shows at least 16 individuals sitting on the ground with their hands bound behind their backs with zip-cords: they are wearing high-visibility vests with descriptions of Doctor, Nurse, and EMT (emergency medical technician). These people were all arrested for taking part in a riot. . . . At least five doctors are known to have been arrested and detained by police for more than 24 hours. . . . The actions of the Hong Kong Police Force have fallen far below accepted international norms for the handling of volunteer emergency medical providers. The arrest of these personnel is almost unheard of in civilised countries and is incompatible with the compact of humanitarianism. Furthermore, the chilling effect can only serve to deter would-be volunteers from offering their services in the much-needed medical care of injured people in this ongoing uncivil war.⁶⁴

At the U.K. House of Lords, Dr. Mann even testified that the Hong Kong police have turned the city's medical system into “an instrument of terror.”⁶⁵

Firefighters. Another group of professionals who routinely work closely with police officers and emergency care providers are firefighters. Firefighters first won

⁶¹ Simon Shen, Letter to Siu-Por Lam (Carrie Lam's husband),” Simon's Glos World, Feb. 2, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/223783954322429/posts/3018581091509354/?d=n>.

⁶² Elizabeth Cheung, “People's Daily take Hong Kong's Hospital Authority to task over its response to a doctor's arrest during Sunday's protests,” *Xinhua*, Oct. 15, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3033053/xinhua-peoples-daily-take-hong-kongs-hospital-authority>.

⁶³ Cheung, “Xinhua, People's Daily take Hong Kong's Hospital Authority to task over its response to a doctor's arrest during Sunday's protests.”

⁶⁴ Darren Mann, “International humanitarian norms are violated in Hong Kong,” *The Lancet*, Nov. 21, 2019, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32909-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32909-5/fulltext).

⁶⁵ Christopher Hughes' account of the talk, cited with permission, circulated on listserv Chinapol, Dec 18, 2019.

public applause when they answered calls to assist the injured during the Yuen Long incident of July 21, 2019, when police officers walked away. The same incident, however, also led the police to begin targeting firefighters. The police ordered the Fire Services Department (FSD) to seek permission when operating at protest sites. In October 2019, over 200 frontline firefighters issued a statement accusing senior FSD officials of “blindly supporting” the police. The statement reads: “We have witnessed many times that police officers obstruct, mislead or even insult FSD personnel who were conducting rescue operations. . . . If anyone needs medical services, FSD personnel have a legal responsibility to ensure the injured person receives timely and suitable care and hospitalization.”⁶⁶ Among the 31 civil servants who have been arrested and suspended by January 2020, nine are firefighters and first-aiders with the FSD.⁶⁷ More staff have had their social media accounts scrutinized for any pro-protest speech.⁶⁸

Lawyers. The arrested need legal assistance and legal fees. Since July 2019, over 200 lawyers have provided pro bono legal service.⁶⁹ However, the police have put barriers between the arrested and the volunteer lawyers. Lawyers must first know the names and identity numbers of the arrested. In many instances caught on film, riot police are seen to muffle the arrested so that they cannot call out their identity. Even with names and identity numbers, lawyers need to run in and out of different police stations in different districts to look for the arrested. On August 11, the police sent the arrested to San Uk Ling, the farthest possible detention center close to the border. When lawyers finally discovered the location, they were denied access for as long as 12 hours.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, officers compelled the detained to answer questions without legal representation.

Joy Luk, a blind lawyer who shows up at protest sites to counsel the arrested on their rights and to take down their identities, has been shot by tear gas and water

⁶⁶ Holmes Chan, “Explainer: Aggressive policing creates rifts in Hong Kong’s civil service, with firefighters caught in fallout,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Nov. 11, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/11/11/explainer-aggressive-policing-creates-rifts-hong-kongs-civil-service-firefighters-caught-fallout/>; “Hong Kong’s firemen statement,” Oct. 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ssDzt2jGwk&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR365Ym8STp-Ehs-fHTtgOMFcCG-QQ2sRu2REpfE4b8b4BHCc2XjBpAfT2Q>.

⁶⁷ [No author] “41 civil servants arrested, 9 firefighters and first-aiders suspended, 31 dismissed,” *Ming Pao*, Jan. 11, 2019, <https://news.mingpao.com/pns/港聞/article/20200111/s00002/1578682011235/41公務員示威被捕-9消防救護停職-共31人停職-羅智光稱考慮觀感公眾利益>.

⁶⁸ Chan, “Explainer: Aggressive policing creates rifts in Hong Kong’s civil service, with firefighters caught in fallout.”

⁶⁹ Steve Vines, “Chan Tong-kai case, discussion with Joseph Cheng & volunteer lawyers,” *The Pulse, Radio Television Hong Kong*, Oct. 26, 2019, <https://www.rthk.hk/tv/dtt31/programme/thepulse/episode/—595615>.

⁷⁰ [No author] “Police claimed to have no room, allowed access by lawyers only after 12 hours of detention,” *Stand News*, Aug. 12, 2019, <https://thestandnews.com/politics/8-11-被捕者-林耀強-警指-無房-扣逾12小時才准見律師-做法離譜/>.

cannon and arrested herself.⁷¹ Supporters have also raised funds to help the arrested with legal fees and living expenses. On December 19, the police froze the Spark Alliance's HK\$70 million and detained four leaders for "money laundering."⁷²

Journalists. Carrie Lam disclosed at Davos that she faced pressure from the pro-regime camp to require reporters to seek official permission, but she rejected the idea for fear of undermining freedom of media.⁷³ While that may be a "softer" gesture, journalists who are on site to film and record police abuses have been subject to harder repression. The police have denied reporters access to scenes of arrests, blocked and damaged their cameras, fired crowd-control weapons at them, and attacked and even arrested some. The motivation is well captured by what officers have said to reporters: "Film, film, film! You love to film!"⁷⁴ and "If we tell you not to film, you have to stop filming!"⁷⁵ Police actions against journalists dramatically escalated during the run up to the national day on October 1 and after. Multiple reporters were injured on October 1, leading various news organizations to recall their reporters for the day.⁷⁶ At various locations, the police dragged reporters to the ground and pepper-sprayed them even when they were not close to protesters.⁷⁷

International correspondents, as well as local reporters, have been targeted. American journalist Suzanne Sataline was detained and wrote about how she became

⁷¹ Rachel Cheung, "Hong Kong's blind protester on life on the front line and why she will keep demonstrating," *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 1, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3035679/hong-kongs-blind-protester-life-front-line-and>.

⁷² Caitlin E. Schultz, "Arrests over protest fundraising are just part of Hong Kong's criminalisation of political dissent," *Hong Kong Free Press*, Jan. 4, 2020, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2020/01/04/arrests-protest-fundraising-just-part-hong-kongs-criminalisation-political-dissent/>.

⁷³ Kang-chung Ng, "Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam reveals she is 'facing a lot of pressure' to rein in journalists as protests rock city," *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 23, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3047257/hong-kong-leader-carrie-lam-reveals-she-facing-lot-pressure>.

⁷⁴ [No author] "Journalists and Photojournalists Associations condemn police firing pepper balls at 8 reporters while saying 'film, film, film, you love to film'," *Ming Pao*, Sept. 8, 2019, <https://news.mingpao.com/ins/港聞/article/20190908/s00001/1567908647870/【逃犯條例】記協攝記協譴責警阻採訪向8記者噴椒-邊噴邊說「影影影咁鍾意影」>

⁷⁵ [no author] "Police frisked Stand News reporter and snatched smart phone to stop filming," *Stand News*, Dec. 21, 2019, <https://www.thestandnews.com/politics/警屯門截查-立場新聞-記者-強搶手機阻拍攝-扯爛記者設備袋/>.

⁷⁶ Holmes Chan, "Scores of Hong Kong journalists injured during National Day protests, as some outlets recall staff from frontlines," *Hong Kong Free Press*, Oct. 2, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/10/02/scores-hong-kong-journalists-injured-national-day-protests-outlets-recall-staff-frontlines/>.

⁷⁷ Lianan Films, "Pepper-spraying the press," Facebook, Oct. 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=406407750045343>.

part of the news.⁷⁸ The most notorious case was the firing of a projectile that blinded Indonesian journalist Veby Indah, even though she was standing with other visibly identified journalists away from protesters.⁷⁹

The international Committee to Protect Journalists has documented “numerous incidents of unprovoked attacks on journalist with pepper spray or tear gas,” noting that such “disturbing incidents” are “difficult to explain as anything other than intentional attacks or, at a minimum, extremely undisciplined and unprofessional police work.”⁸⁰ The Hong Kong Journalist Association (HKJA) has similarly tallied the wounds suffered by its members and compiled written and visual reports.⁸¹ In October 2019, it sued the police for “deliberately aggressive and obstructive police tactics, as well as unnecessary and excessive force” against members.⁸² In January 2020, the HKJA further complained that police spokespersons used “lies to cover up the abuse of power by frontline officers.”⁸³

In addition to physical abuses, police officers also have broadcast reporters’ identity cards on live-streaming media in violation of their privacy.⁸⁴ A pro-Beijing newspaper, *Ta Kung Pao*, published the names and personal details of six reporters who put up protest signs reading “Investigate Policy Violence and End Police Lies,” while they were attending a police press conference.⁸⁵ Radio Television Hong Kong, a publicly funded media organization, has been criticized for not serving as the government’s mouthpiece and is threatened to have its funding and programs cut.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Suzanne Sataline, “Hong Kong’s Worsening Press Climate,” *The Atlantic*, Oct. 11, 2019 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/hong-kong-police-are-targeting-press/599815/>.

⁷⁹ Tom Grundy, “Journalist shot in face with Hong Kong police projectile will lose sight permanently in right eye, lawyer says,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Oct. 2, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/10/02/breaking-journalist-shot-face-hong-kong-police-projectile-will-lose-sight-permanently-right-eye-lawyer-says/>.

⁸⁰ Robert Mahoney, “CPJ calls on Hong Kong chief executive to establish body to probe police violence against journalists,” Committee to Protect Journalists, Oct. 9, 2019, <https://cpj.org/2019/10/cpj-calls-on-hong-kong-chief-executive-to-establish.php>.

⁸¹ “We refuse to be silent,” Hong Kong Journalists Association, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/HKJA.official/videos/?v=242729300308/488118018440222/?type=2&theater>.

⁸² “HKJA FILES Application for Judicial Review against the Commissioner of Police,” Hong Kong Journalists Association, Oct 3, 2019, <https://www.hkja.org.hk/en/statements/hkja-files-application-for-judicial-review-against-the-commissioner-of-police/>.

⁸³ “Police must stop lying about attacks,” Hong Kong Journalists Association, Jan. 1, 2020, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1503815-20200120.htm>

⁸⁴ Christy Leung, “Police officers ‘received verbal warnings’ for holding reporters’ identity cards in front of live-streaming cameras during Hong Kong protests,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 22, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3047073/police-officers-received-verbal-warnings-holding>.

⁸⁵ [No author] “Western District mouthpiece blackens the press, *Ta Kung* publishes the names and faces of 6 reporters,” *Apple Daily*, Nov. 5, 2019, <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/realtime/article/20191105/60234130>.

⁸⁶ “Slash RTHK’s funding, says former CE CY Leung,” Dec. 29, 2019, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1500008-20191229.htm>.

Educators. Among the 7,000-plus people arrested, over 2,800 are students, one as young as 11-years-old.⁸⁷ Thousands of university and secondary school students have clashed with the police; many more have done what Education Secretary Kevin Yeung warns they should not do: “stage, or participate in political activities, including class boycotts, singing songs, chanting slogans, forming human chains or other related activities like distributing flyers promoting political messages.”⁸⁸

According to a *People's Daily* commentary, students should be as pure as white sheets of paper, but have become militant because Hong Kong's educators have polluted their minds and incited hatred of the police.⁸⁹ Police spokespeople likewise blame educators for “leading students in criminal acts.”⁹⁰ Chief Executive Lam calls protesters “enemies of the people.”⁹¹ Pro-Beijing businesswoman Annie Suk-ching Wu, owner of Hong Kong's Maxim restaurant chains, told China's *Global Times*, “I think we have lost two entire young generations.”⁹² The sieges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Polytechnic University in November 2019 marked an escalated campaign to breach their hitherto safe refuges.

Secondary and primary schools in Hong Kong are numerous and not easy to control. Nevertheless, Kevin Yeung told the *Shanghai Observer* that he has the authority to sack school principals who do not discharge the required duties.⁹³ Since Fall 2019, the Education Department has asked schools to hand over names of teachers and students who participated in class strikes and to suspend the 80 teachers who have been arrested, even if they have not been charged or convicted.⁹⁴ When it was

⁸⁷ [No author] “Chris Tang: 7019 arrested, 38 convicted since the anti-extradition protests,” *AM730*, Jan. 16, 2019, <https://www.am730.com.hk/news/新聞/鄧炳強：去年6月至今拘7019人-檢控1092人-204034>.

⁸⁸ “Students at govt schools warned against protesting,” Radio Television Hong Kong, Nov. 21, 2019, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1493731-20191121.htm>.

⁸⁹ Zhang Pan, “This kind of Hong Kong teachers, so damaging of teaching ethics,” *People's Daily* (overseas edition), Aug. 28, 2019, p. 1, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb/html/2019-08/28/content_1943542.htm.

⁹⁰ Needham, “There's a bigger and more insidious threat to Hong Kong than the PLA.”

⁹¹ Louisa Lim, “If Protests Are an ‘Infection,’ What Is China's Cure?” *New York Times*, Nov. 23, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/23/opinion/sunday/hong-kong-protests.html>.

⁹² Kimmy Chung, “Daughter of Maxim's founder hits out again at Hong Kong protesters, saying she has lost hope in the next two generations,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 4, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3036260/daughter-maxims-founder-hits-out-again-hong-kong-protesters>.

⁹³ Kris Cheng, “Hong Kong education chief warns principals may be fired if they support teachers under investigation over protests,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Dec. 30, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/12/30/hong-kong-education-chief-warns-principals-may-fired-support-teachers-investigation-protests/>.

⁹⁴ Kris Cheng, “Hong Kong teachers risk punishment if they post ‘hate speech’ on social media or are arrested for serious crimes, says education chief,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Dec. 21, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/12/21/hong-kong-teachers-risk-punishment-post-hate-speech-social-media-arrested-serious-crimes-says-education-chief/>; Xinqi Su and Yan Zhao, “Hong Kong teachers living in fear over protest support,” AFP, Jan. 15, 2020,

disclosed that the topic for the upcoming inter-school debate competition would be “reorganization of the police force,” the Education Department pressed schools to withdraw from the competition and provide lists of students involved.⁹⁵ Pro-Beijing teaching staff have filed complaints about their pro-democracy colleagues’ “hate speech,” “provocative acts,” or “inappropriate comments,” with consequences of suspension, demotion, postponement of salary increase, or transfer to non-teaching posts.⁹⁶ In at least one case, a teacher was absolved by the school for what he said on Facebook that was only shared with friends, but was still issued a warning letter for misconduct by the Education Department.⁹⁷ To proactively root out dissenting voices, the Education Department is hiring retired police officers to investigate teachers and students.⁹⁸ Some schools recently have installed CCTV cameras in classrooms.⁹⁹ The Professional Teachers’ Union, which has been at the vanguard of Hong Kong’s democracy movement for decades, decried the “white terror” campaign at a rally on January 4, 2020.¹⁰⁰

Beijing also attributes the protests to the weakness of Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong. The November 1, 2019 decision by the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Plenum emphasizes the need to “strengthen national education of Hong Kong and Macau people, especially civil servants and youth, including education of the constitution and the Basic Law, Chinese history and culture, in order to boost

<https://news.yahoo.com/hong-kong-teachers-living-fear-over-protest-support-041048981.html>.

⁹⁵ Lok-kei, Sum, “A touchy subject: Hong Kong government accused of stifling debate in city by organisers of schools’ competition,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 11, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3045664/touchy-subject-hong-kong-government-accused-stifling>.

⁹⁶ Ho-him Chan, “At least 80 Hong Kong teachers have been arrested over anti-government protests, as education chief reveals at least four have resigned or been suspended,” *South China Morning Post*, Dec. 20, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3043044/least-80-hong-kong-teachers-have-been-arrested-over-anti>.

⁹⁷ Lik-hang Tang, “Teacher judged for professional misconduct by Education Department after case dismissed by school,” *Apple Daily*, Feb. 10, 2020, <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/20200210/QL6X7Q2KYQIILNUDWPOAWR4AJM>.

⁹⁸ The Civil Service Bureau’s job advertisement is at https://csboa1.csb.gov.hk/csboa/jve/JVE_003.action.

⁹⁹ [No author] “Po Leung Kuk secondary school set up surveillance CCTV; angry parents: going to school is not going to jail,” *Apple Daily*, Jan. 22, 2020, <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/local/20200122/OGQS2A54CCEWQ3XK2H7BV36AGE/>.

¹⁰⁰ Zoe Low and Kang-chung Ng, “Hong Kong teachers’ union is one inciting ‘white terror’ not us, says Education Bureau,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 3, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3044411/hong-kong-teachers-union-one-inciting-white-terror-not-us>.

their national consciousness and patriotic spirit.”¹⁰¹ Kevin Yeung has launched a review of textbooks for “liberal studies”¹⁰² that are accused of radicalizing students.¹⁰³

While secondary schools are the new battlegrounds, universities have long been targets of hard and soft repression because professors and college students share a longer history of dissent. The 2014 Umbrella Movement was spearheaded by the Occupy Trio, two of whom are Professors Benny Tai of Hong Kong University and Kin-man Chan of Chinese University. They have since been sentenced to 16 months in jail. Tai is waiting for appeal, but the university is launching disciplinary procedure to dismiss him.¹⁰⁴ Another pro-democracy legislator and professor Ka-Chun Shiu of the Baptist University, also convicted for his leading role in the Umbrella Movement, has been dismissed. In addition, faculty believe that the Liaison Office sends mainland students to report on classes, especially those at the Law School of the Hong Kong University, the Government and Public Administration Department of the Chinese University, the Journalism School at Baptist University, and the Cultural Studies program at Lingnan University.¹⁰⁵

To rein in the broader campuses, the Hong Kong government has wielded the power of funding and appointment. After the outbreak of protests, officials have taken “swift revenge” by cutting back funding.¹⁰⁶ The sticks of appointments have been deployed for much longer. Former Chief Executive C. Y. Leung already stacked university councils with pro-regime appointees.¹⁰⁷ The loyal councilors then duly appointed politically correct candidates to become presidents and deans. As an example, Johannes Chan, former dean of the Hong Kong University Law School, was

¹⁰¹ Kinling Lo and Jun Mai, “Beijing reiterates call for Hong Kong to prioritise national security, patriotic education,” *South China Morning Post*, Nov. 1, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/—news/china/diplomacy/article/3035913/beijing-reiterates-call-hong-kong-prioritise-national-security>.

¹⁰² “Kevin Yeung earlier said participation was voluntary, today required publishers to submit civic education textbooks,” Radio Television Hong Kong, Dec. 29, 2019, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/ch/component/k2/1500052-20191229.htm>.

¹⁰³ Tiffany May and Amy Qin, “The High School Course Beijing Accuses of Radicalizing Hong Kong,” *New York Times*, Sept. 1, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/01/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-education-china.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Ho-him Chan and Alvin Lum, “University of Hong Kong starts procedure to decide whether co-founder of Occupy movement Benny Tai should be fired from his teaching job,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 14, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3046077/university-hong-kong-starts-procedure-decide-whether-co>.

¹⁰⁵ [No author] “Bruce Lui: HKU law and CUHK politics classes are subject to surveillance,” *Apple Daily*, Nov. 4, 2019, <https://hk.news.appledaily.com/china/realtime/article/20191104/60227041>.

¹⁰⁶ John Burns, “Beijing takes swift revenge against Hongkongers, and universities are the first victim,” *Hong Kong Free Press*, Nov. 30, 2019, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2019/11/30/beijing-takes-swift-revenge-hongkongers-universities-first-victim/>.

¹⁰⁷ Yojana Sharma, “Controlling Hong Kong HE is ‘top priority’ for China,” *University World News*, Feb. 11, 2020, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php>.

accused of sheltering Benny Tai, and thus denied promotion to become a pro-Vice Chancellor. Since the closure of the Umbrella Movement, all universities have experienced reshuffles in leadership.

Vice Chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Rocky Tuan offers an interesting exception. He originally made only non-committal statements which students found wanting.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, after an emotional meeting with students on October 10, 2019, in which students wept recounting the torture and sexual assault that they had experienced by the police, Professor Tuan issued an open letter on October 18 stating, “Any proven case of improper use of force or violation of human rights by certain police officers must be condemned.”¹⁰⁹ Such mild language should not be controversial, especially given that about 80 percent of the Hong Kong population support an independent inquiry into police abuses.¹¹⁰ However, the chairs of eight university councils immediately issued a rebuttal stating that universities should not be involved in politics and that faculty and students who have broken the law are subject to disciplinary actions.¹¹¹ All four police associations, the Superintendents’ Association, the Police Inspectors’ Association, the Overseas Inspectors’ Association, and the Junior Police Officers’ Association, were quick to condemn Tuan for his “biased” statement based on only student accounts.¹¹² The *People’s Daily* likewise published a commentary attacking Tuan.¹¹³ The *China Daily* followed suit.¹¹⁴ In

¹⁰⁸ Gary Cheung and Kimmy Chung, “President Rocky Tuan of Chinese University says students facing protest-related criminal charges to get help paying legal fees – but still gets his car covered with slogans,” *South China Morning Post*, Aug. 1, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3021010/president-roland-chin-baptist-university-calls-truth>.

¹⁰⁹ “CUHK Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Rocky S. Tuan’s Open Letter,” Oct. 18, 2019 https://www.cpr.cuhk.edu.hk/en/press_detail.php?id=3140&t=cuhk-vice-chancellor-and-president-professor-rocky-s-tuan-s-open-letter&fbclid=IwAR21OhNMylTjV9zurTR37ZX9K9m3rYINOV5zAeJsRpEG8X7No-nWvQRPs9A.

¹¹⁰ Francis L. F. Lee, “Our research in Hong Kong reveals what people really think of the protesters—and the police,” *The Independent*, Oct. 16, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/hong-kong-protests-police-violence-public-opinion-polling-support-a9158061.html>.

¹¹¹ “Statement from Students’ Unions of Higher Institutions in Response to the Joint Statement Issued by Heads of Eight University Governing Councils,” Oct. 22, 2019, <https://www.hkcnnews.com/article/24377/大學校董會主席-大學校董會-24377/政權傀儡越俎代庖-妄語媚共恬不知恥——大專學界就八大高層發表聯合公告之聲明>.

¹¹² Phila Siu and Elizabeth Cheung, “Hong Kong’s police associations slam Chinese University head Rocky Tuan for ‘biased’ statement based on students’ accounts of alleged assaults by officers,” *South China Morning Post*, Oct. 23, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/3034278/hong-kongs-police-associations-slam-chinese-university>.

¹¹³ Su Di, “How to behave in order to be really responsible for Hong Kong’s youth?” *People’s Daily*, Oct. 18, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Bx0RyqqybcedwEUB-KMGHg>.

¹¹⁴ Chow Pak-chin, “Chinese University would be better off without Rocky Tuan,” *China Daily Hong Kong*, Jan. 16, 2020, <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/article/118824>.

pointed contrast, *Times Higher Education* named Professor Tuan one of its “people of the year.”¹¹⁵ Soft – or more properly speaking, sharp -- repression likely awaits Tuan.

Prospects

Are the combined hard and soft forms of repression—the extensive uses of sharp power or political warfare by Beijing and the Hong Kong government, coupled with coercion by nominally Hong Kong police—effective? With over 7,000 people arrested and thousands more injured, core protesters have suffered high attrition. With hard and soft repression extended to the “other frontliners,” especially medics, lawyers, and journalists, even the most committed protesters could be isolated from needed support. With systematic dismissals of pro-democracy civil servants and educators along with Cathay Pacific staff, wider society lives in a blanket of intimidation.

With the appointment of hardline state leaders to oversee Hong Kong, an even harder and sharper crackdown to “stop the violence and end the turmoil” may yet to come.¹¹⁶ The new Liaison Office director Luo Huining has reiterated the need to introduce national security law and related measures in Hong Kong.¹¹⁷ The new Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office director Xia Baolong has a track record of demolishing crosses and churches in Zhejiang on President Xi Jinping’s order.

Nevertheless, even though Beijing has successfully “mainlandized” the police force, the rest of the society is much harder to subdue. As scholars of contentious politics Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow explain,

Repression generally succeeds in smothering contention if the prior level of mobilization was low. However, if state violence is increased after a protest cycle . . . is well underway, this repression is more likely to provoke even higher levels of challenge, both nonviolent and violent, rather than deter contention.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Joyce Lau, Matthew Reisz, Anna McKie, Jack Grove, Ellie Bothwell, John Ross, Paul Basken, John Morgan and Chris Havergal, “People of the year: who mattered in higher education in 2019,” *Times Higher Education*, Dec. 17, 2019, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/people-year-who-mattered-higher-education-in-2019>.

¹¹⁶ Mark O'Neill, “Why Hong Kong conflicts could worsen under new HKMAO chief,” *Economic Journal Insight*, Feb. 20, 2020, <http://www.ejinsight.com/20200220-why-hong-kong-conflicts-could-worsen-under-new-hkmao-chief/>.

¹¹⁷ Iain Marlow and Claire Che, “China’s Top Official in Hong Kong Urges Enacting National Security Law,” *Bloomberg*, Jan. 20, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-01-21/china-s-top-official-in-hong-kong-urges-enacting-security-law>.

¹¹⁸ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, p. 110.

As a report compiled by the centrist Third Way shows, the majority of hardcore protesters are driven and radicalized by police brutality.¹¹⁹ The government's purge of civil servants and teachers on the one hand, and its carte blanche immunity for the police on the other, has further inflamed the protest movement.

Protesters have vowed to fight on but have switched to more sustainable forms of contention. Newly elected District Councilors have tried to hold the government and the police more accountable despite obstructions from loyalist police officers and civil servants. Supporters have created a "yellow economic circle" to patronize pro-democracy "yellow businesses" and boycott pro-regime "blue businesses," integrating the struggle into daily life. Various professions have formed new unions so as to launch more effective strikes.

Meanwhile, the coronavirus has added fuel to the fire and has the potential to further unite the pro-democracy and normally pro-regime camps. Carrie Lam's initial refusal to wear face masks at press conferences in January highlighted both her subservience to Beijing's downplaying of the public health risks from the virus and her support for the unconstitutional ban on protesters' wearing face masks. Lam's refusal to close the borders to control the spread of the virus, as advised by Hong Kong's most trusted university doctors, is another example that the Chief Executive lacks autonomy. When Hong Kong's medics launched a strike from February 3-7, 2020, they enjoyed 80 percent of popular support.¹²⁰ Other sectors, including immigration officers, Hong Kong Rail staff, Dragonair crews, and hotel workers have also discussed industrial actions.

Luo Huining has ridiculed medical workers' strike as a "political form of coronavirus."¹²¹ Beijing has associated boycotts and strikes with "color revolutions"¹²² and shown no more tolerance for these nonviolent means than violent street confrontations. As a Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office spokesman said earlier, the goal of strikes and boycotts is "to paralyze the Hong Kong government" and "seize the power for governing the Special Administrative Region."¹²³ If the authorities block peaceful, legal channels with harsher repression, Hong Kong will only become more ungovernable.

Ultimately, Xia Baolong should be reminded that, if he treats Hong Kong like Zhejiang, the rest of the world would follow suit. The coronavirus has provided a timely and vivid illustration of what it means when the international community is

¹¹⁹ Kang-chung, Ng "New survey of Hong Kong protesters says 80 per cent support 'one country, two systems' and don't want independence from China," *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 16, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3046451/new-survey-hong-kong-protesters-says-80-support-one-country>.

¹²⁰ Timothy McLaughlin, "Democracy Drives Labor in a Hyper-Capitalist City," *The Atlantic*, Feb. 6, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/02/unions-hong-kong-protest-coronavirus/606136/>.

¹²¹ [No author] "HK troublemakers are a political virus: Luo Huining," Radio Television Hong Kong, Feb. 20, 2020, <https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/en/component/k2/1509714-20200220.htm>.

¹²² Zhang Yunbi, "HK 'color revolution' signs seen," *China Daily Global*, Sept. 6, 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201909/06/WS5d71ac70a310cf3e3556a085.html>.

¹²³ Zhang, "HK 'color revolution' signs seen."

convinced that the visible and invisible borders that protect the Hong Kong system from the mainland system has vanished. When Hong Kong did not ban travel from Wuhan, the epicenter of the virus, neighboring countries imposed travel bans on Hong Kong along with other Chinese cities. The U.S.'s Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act passed in November 2019 mandates annual certification of Hong Kong's autonomy if the city is to maintain its special economic status.¹²⁴ Here is the last limit on what Beijing cannot do—if Chinese elites still want to access dual use technologies, raise funds, park clean and corrupt money, and seek better health care in Hong Kong.



¹²⁴ What has allowed Hong Kong to escape the fate of Tiananmen is its international status. “In 1989, international sanctions against Beijing came only *after* a bloody massacre. In 2019, the U.S. Congress tabled, debated, and passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act in the face of heightening police brutality.” Victoria Tin-bor Hui, “Hong Kong’s Protests: Look Beyond Tiananmen 2.0,” *The Diplomat*, Dec. 6, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/hong-kongs-protests-look-beyond-tiananmen-2-0/>.